



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Stephen D. Isler
COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jason W. Papanikolas (Mayor Pro Tem)
Amanda M. Dewey
Jeffrey Jay Osmond
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes February 3, 2020 | 7:06 pm

The Council met in executive session regarding a personnel matter from 6:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The regular meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m.

Present were Mayor Stephen Isler, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Ethan Sweep, and Jeffrey Jay Osmond. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Code Director Hollyce Goodwin, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Board of Election Supervisor candidates, Sharmila Bhatia, Laura Bowers, Sharon McCraney, Paul McNulty, Debby Steele Snyder and Tracy O'Heir, PTA Vice Sara Jacobson, BHVD representatives Kyle Snyder and Ryan Wagner and citizens.

1. Announcements

Mayor Isler announced that the Council held an executive session on a personnel matter prior to this meeting.

2. Discussion Items

Election judges appointment: TM Broadbent said that the process of recruiting election judges was changed for this cycle to require candidates to submit an application form. Six of the seven applicants are present today so the Council can ask them questions and vet them. Approval would take place at the February Town meeting.

The Council interviewed the following applicants to the Board of Election Supervisors: Sharmila Bhatia, Laura Bowers, Sharon McCraney, Paul McNulty, Tracy O'Heir and Debby Steele Snyder. Lee Fuerst was unable to attend but expressed her interest in continuing to serve on the Board. Each responded to the Council's question why they want to serve as an election judge and how voter turnout might be improved. Reasons for wanting to serve ranged from the desire to support an important civic duty to enjoyment of connecting with neighbors and the larger community. Suggestions for increasing voter participation focused on better advertising of the election, e.g. placing signage in many places throughout the Town; sending messages through social media, and engaging residents where they shop, and their children go to school.

Current Chief Election Judge Sharmila Bhatia explained how the position of a Chief Judge differs from that of a regular judge. She said the main difference is the responsibility for deciding how to resolve problems that may arise on election day, such as handling voters whose names are not on the rolls or whether to conduct a recount. Paul McNulty nominated Ms. Bhatia to continue to serve as Chief Judge. The Council had no objection. Ms. Bhatia accepted the nomination. The Council also set Wednesday, April 29 as the date for Candidates' Night.

FY 2021 funding requests: Mayor Isler said a number of representatives from Town organizations and KHarpers

departments are present tonight to present their requests for budget enhancements for FY 2021.

Green Team: The Green Team will submit their funding request later as they are still working on a program for next year.

Seniors Club: The Seniors Club requested some Senior Center improvements that will be presented as part of the Administration Department's enhancement requests at the next worksession.

Boys & Girls Club: The Boys & Girls Club representative could not attend tonight's meeting but the Club's request will be similar to last year's, including liability insurance and marketing materials.

Historical Committee: Sharmila Bhatia, Vice Chair of the Historical Committee, said the Committee will request the same amount as in previous years: \$2000, plus \$400 through the Recreation Council events line item. The funds would be used to improve the museum, to purchase oral history recording equipment, to produce a plaque for the late Mayor Armistead and a heavy-duty post for a historic marker dedicated last fall.

Recreation Council: Susan Jones, President of the Recreation Council, said the organization will request the same amount as last year. Most of the funds will be used for Berwyn Heights Day and many smaller events throughout the year. She is exploring co-hosting the Lake Artemesia summer concerts with College Park and sharing expenses. No additional money will be requested for concerts.

Berwyn Heights Elementary School PTA: Sara Jacobson, Vice President of the BHES PTA, said the PTA requests assistance with funding traveling science programs of the Maryland Zoo and/ or the Maryland Science Center, which cost \$1,200 - \$1,500 each. She also sought clarification on whether the Town would fund both the Berwyn Heights Elementary School and PTA programs in a given fiscal year. She is concerned that the PTA and the School, which has also requested funding, might be competing or asking to fund the same thing.

Ms. Jacobson was told both entities can request funds and the Council decides whether to fund them. The PTA and the School may want to talk to make sure they are not asking for the same thing. Ms. Jacobson said she believes the School is seeking funding for students to attend Imagination Theater in Bethesda, costing \$11 per student or approximately \$800 per grade. TM Broadbent suggested the School submit a separate funding request by February 20 so that it can be included among all budget enhancement requests.

CM Dewey said she is considering setting up a Town scholarship for a Berwyn Heights student or students to attend a summer enrichment camp. She has asked the Education Advisory Committee (BHEAC) for recommendations and would like to hear what the PTA thinks. Ms. Jacobson said a more open-ended scholarship not tied to a specific program might be more attractive.

Ms. Jacobson further suggested the Town disseminate more information in Spanish in order to engage the sizable Spanish-speaking population in Berwyn Heights. The PTA has difficulty recruiting Latinos to serve on its board and believes the language barrier prevents them from joining. TM Broadbent agreed and added the Town's election signs and street banner should be in Spanish. CM Dewey proposed to offer voter registration as part of Census Day, during which Spanish translation service will be available.

Volunteer Fire Department: BHVFD Board Members Kyle Snyder and Ryan Wagner presented the BHVFD funding request of \$10,000. Mr. Snyder gave an overview of the fire department's 2019 accomplishments including the purchase of a new \$1.2 million heavy-duty rescue squad, as well as fire station and ambulance upgrades. Two BHVFD were awarded Firefighter of the Year Awards for the

rescue of Berwyn Heights residents on 60th Avenue, and the Department continued to participate in Berwyn Heights Day, and other events.

Mr. Snyder said that the BHVFD has annual expenses of approximately \$250,000, almost half of which are dedicated to paying off apparatus purchases. The Department has been exploring building a new fire station estimated to cost \$13 million, either in the current location or on the lots it owns across the street from the current station. Funding will be requested from the State of Maryland through a bond bill and from the County's CIP budget. BHVFD may ask the Town to support its funding requests.

In response to questions, Mr. Snyder and Wagner said that the BHVFD is not struggling in terms of membership but would like to have more volunteers, especially from Berwyn Heights itself. Many of its volunteers are from out of state or are students at UMD. Applicants for a firefighter position will undergo a background check performed by the County, which would cover related medical tests. If the cost of a medical test is an obstacle for an applicant, the BHVFD would likely cover them.

Code Department: Code Director Hollyce Goodwin presented the Code Department's requests for budget enhancements. These include an increase of \$3,000 in the network/software support line item, which covers annual maintenance and licensing of the Comcate code management system, including a new personal property tax module; an increase of \$800 in the training line item; an increase of \$250 for uniforms; and increase of \$550 in the travel line item to attend training in more distant locations; an increase of \$300 in the gas & oil line item and an increase of \$100 in the vehicle maintenance line item to cover an additional code vehicle. Most of the increases are related to the hiring of a new full-time officer.

TM Broadbent added that some of the increased costs could be offset by the recommended discontinuation of the call-a-bus program. Ms. Goodwin explained there has been a sharp decline in demand for transportation and if requests come in the code vehicle is used. The Town's bus has been transferred to the City of Greenbelt, which has spent considerable funds on maintenance and repair to keep it in service.

In response to questions, TM Broadbent said Greenbelt is not transporting any Berwyn Heights residents but has returned the bus for Berwyn Heights Day and to allow Town organizations to use it. Ms. Goodwin said the uniform appropriation covers 3 sets of embroidered shirts, pants and appropriate shoes.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commented that usage may have declined because the bus was in bad shape. The bus might still be useful for transporting school children across busy Kenilworth Avenue. MPT Papanikolas replied that students can ride the County's The Bus for free, if no school buses are available.

Police Department: Chief Antolik presented the Police Department's budget enhancement requests.

- \$50,800 increase in capital projects line item to purchase a new hybrid police vehicle and replace one of the older vehicles.
- \$5,000 for new language pay benefit for the Department's two Spanish speaking employees. Their services are in great demand to assist the Town's increasing Latino population. The benefit is offered in several neighboring municipalities and would help retain valuable Berwyn Heights employees.
- \$2,000 increase in the uniforms line to purchase 2 ballistic vests and new uniforms for police aides. May be offset in part by a grant.
- \$12,000 increase in the capital projects line to purchase a new handheld radio, in-vehicle radio and in-vehicle rugged laptop for the additional officer.
- \$2,700 increase in locality pay for an additional officer who lives within 5 miles of the Town.
- \$1,293 increase in salary line to fund one standard promotion to Pfc after successful completion of

1-year probationary period.

In response to questions, TM Broadbent said that setting up a vehicle replacement reserve for police vehicles would cost the same amount than purchasing them outright every year. Her recommendation is to start funding replacement whenever a new vehicle is purchased. Chief Antolik said BHPD has switched to purchasing more expensive all-wheel drive SUVs to carry all the gear an officer needs. Language pay would only be offered to Spanish speaking employees, but not employees speaking any other languages. Approximately 55% of call for service are from Spanish speaking residents. Language pay is one way to remain competitive with neighboring jurisdictions.

Chief Antolik said that the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Committee (NW/EP) requires no increase in funding in FY 2021. The allotted \$3,500 budget will be used in part to recruit new members and distribute informative literature. The emergency trailer is not equipped to respond to any medical emergencies such as an epidemic.

Homeowners Tax Credit program budget transfer: TM Broadbent explained that 6 residents have submitted applications for the Town's Homeowners Tax Credit Program (HTC) and 4 are eligible. The credit per applicant turned out to be approximately \$150 or approximately \$700 in total. The Council deferred funding the program until the applications were received, a definitive amount known, and possible unspent money became available. Staff proposes to transfer the money needed from the *Code Salaries* to the *Mayor & Council Miscellaneous* line item. The Council will be asked to adopt an ordinance to amend this year's budget to fund the HTC credit.

In discussion, CM Dewey said she understood that the Council would appropriate a given sum during the budget process and fund credits at the 10% level on a first come first serve basis rather than dividing up the money to all who apply. The first year would be the test run to get a sense of how much money is needed. TM Broadbent said there are number of ways of funding the program. Budgeting upfront would remove the flexibility to fund, or not fund the program from year to year, depending on the availability of funds. The HTC Ordinance authorizes the Town to give a credit but does not obligate it.

MML convention hotel: The Council authorized Clerk Harper to make reservations for a hotel convenient to the convention center, as the Council's preferred hotel was sold out.

Welcome sign committee: TM Broadbent said she would like further guidance from the Council on how to proceed. CM Dewey said she and the Council did not have the time to assemble and supervise another committee, given their involvement with the Walkable, Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force and the Town survey. She also believes that there may not be enough volunteers to sign up for another committee. Previously, two types of signs were proposed: an electronic sign that could display announcements and a more traditional wooden sign from which announcements could be hung, the latter being recommended by the Quality of Life Commission.

Clerk Harper suggested to check with the ATHA/ Maryland Milestones about sign designs and vendors, as this organization produces many signs. She was asked to contact ATHA to obtain a few different designs as well as price ranges to help the Council narrow down options. TM Broadbent said deciding where the signs should go may be more difficult because they would have to be in the Town right-of-way. Phil Ventura suggested putting up temporary signs with different designs in the intended locations to give people an idea what they may look like and invite comments.

Verizon franchise negotiations authority: TM Broadbent said the Town has been asked to redo a resolution to authorize joining with I-Net to negotiate the Verizon franchise agreement using different language. Clerk Harper added that I-Net attorneys have asked to designate Prince George's County and its

municipalities as the negotiating parties, not I-Net itself. The Council had no objections to placing the revised resolution on the next Town meeting agenda

3. Minutes

The Council reviewed the January 8 Town meeting minutes to be adopted at the next Town meeting.

4. Department Reports

MPT Papanikolas said he is looking forward to hearing who will attend the February 12 pre-bid meeting for the Town Hall architectural & engineering study. CM Sweep announced that the street sweeper will be in Town the week of February 17. CM Osmond reported that the new Code officer has started to work.

CM Dewey announced an upcoming Valentines party, a climate change workshop, and another team trivia night. Students between 8th and 11th grade are encouraged to apply to a youth leadership academy in Washington D.C., which prepares high school students for work in international development field. The 4-day training session in July costs only \$100 and there are scholarships to cover the remainder. Interested students should contact her for more information.

TM Broadbent reported she plans to bring in a professional to make an assessment of the Town Center's mechanical systems, which are showing their age. Once she has a better sense of the cost of repairs, she will present the Council with a budget transfer request. Administration is still looking for a reasonably-priced contractor to finish painting the Town office and Senior Center.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the upcoming schedule. No changes were made.

7. Citizens Discussion

Phil Ventura said one of his neighbors was burning brush all day in his back yard, which is against the law. He did not want to call in the fire department but suggested the Town might consider educational initiatives.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk